



MAINE CHIEFS OF POLICE ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 2431 • South Portland, Maine 04116-2431

Chief Edward J. Tolan (ret.), Executive Director, Tel: (207) 838-6583
email: mcopa@maine.rr.com Web site: www.mainechiefs.com

Statement in Opposition to L.D. 1278, An Act To End the Maine Information and Analysis Center Program

April 12, 2021

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MCOPA opposes 1278 because it will make our job more difficult and time-consuming in order to obtain information that we could otherwise obtain through much more arduous efforts. MIAC acts a clearinghouse for information that could otherwise be found only through multiple searches and, in some cases, only through sheer luck. MIAC is not an investigative agency. For example, it does not monitor cell phone calls as we have heard alleged.

MIAC provides information that helps solve crimes, and it also provides information that helps local law enforcement prepare for events that are perfectly legal but which require attention for purpose of traffic or crowd control such as public protests. Our many local departments can rely on the MIAC staff and the people and organizations who submit information to it, rather than trying to duplicate such efforts at many departments.

Here are a few examples of how MIAC has assisted local law enforcement.

From Augusta Police Dept.:

The Augusta Police Department may have more experience dealing with public events of all kinds than most police departments. They have worked with the MIAC using open source (publicly available) information to estimate the numbers of people who would be attending in order to plan staffing levels and permits accordingly. This would have been difficult to impossible without the MIAC, and contributed to the safety of all of these gatherings that have gone off without incident. The police have a legitimate role in ensuring public safety at large events whether they are celebrations, commemorations or expressions of opinion.

If anyone doubted whether it makes sense for law enforcement to collect information ahead of a public gatherings, the events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th should be enough to persuade them otherwise. Advance information was gathered and made available to law enforcement, however, imperfectly. How an agency responds to such information is another matter, but without it the police cannot begin to ensure public safety.

The vast majority of public events in Maine and elsewhere are peaceful and are protected by the First Amendment, and a passive police presence helps to ensure they are peaceful.

From Bath Police Dept.:

A recent example worthy of mention is the apprehension of a man charged with violent crimes against a female. Information about the arrest warrant was provided by Bath P.D. in a bulletin to the Sagadahoc County Communications Center and to the MIAC. The MIAC bulletin was seen by Investigator Don White of the Maine Violent Crimes Task Force who contacted Bath P.D. for further information. Investigator White then took on the responsibility for locating the subject of the warrant and subsequently apprehended him in Woolwich on February 22, 2021, the day after the bulletin came out. The subject is currently in detention at Two Bridges Regional Jail.

From Saco Police Dept.:

MIAC has always been great on reviewing Saco Police Department bulletins, making any necessary alterations, and disseminating them across the state, as well as with other states. MIAC can share this information much quicker than I or anyone in this department could, especially if time is of the essence. Our bulletins describe information on current crime trends in order to get other agencies to communicate with each other regarding similar investigations. This helps combine and piece together evidence for a multi-jurisdictional case. This type of working relationship was helpful for the 2019 to 2020 Felony Lane Gang investigation, the razor-blade-in-pizza-dough case at multiple Hannaford locations, organized check fraud cases, and officer safety bulletins.

Combatting Terrorism:

The federal government initially encouraged states to develop information clearinghouses, aka fusion centers, as a means of gathering information about foreign terrorists' efforts to commit terrorist acts within our nation's borders. While some may take the view that that threat has largely subsided, there has been a definite rise in domestic terrorism as reported by the FBI in recent months. Thus, the role of MIAC in confronting terrorism may have shifted more to activities within our borders, but that makes it no less important and perhaps even more important now than ever.

We urge an Ought Not to Pass report on LD 1278. A better approach and one we believe may satisfy many concerns about the MIAC is LD 12.